

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL®

VAREKAI™

Tales of the Forest



Press Kit

Show Overview

Written and Directed by Dominic Champagne

Varekai is a critically-acclaimed production that has wowed almost 10 million people worldwide since it first premiered in Montreal in 2002. Since then, *Varekai* has visited more than 130 cities in 23 different countries around the world. In 2014 *Varekai* started off a new tour now in an arena format.

Deep within a forest, at the summit of a volcano, exists an extraordinary world where something else is possible. A world called *Varekai*.

The sky lets go a solitary young man, and the story of *Varekai* begins. Parachuted into the shadows of a magical forest, a kaleidoscopic world imbued with fantastical creatures, a young man takes flight in an adventure both absurd and extraordinary. On this day at the edge of time, in this place of pure and undiluted possibility, begins an inspired incantation to a life rediscovered and to a newly found wonder in the mysteries of the world and the mind.

The word *Varekai* (pronounced ver-ay-'kie) means "wherever" in the Romany language of the gypsies—the universal wanderers.

Written and directed by Dominic Champagne, this production pays tribute to the nomadic soul, to the spirit and art of the circus tradition, and to those who quest with infinite passion along the path that leads to *Varekai*.

Varekai emerges from an explosive fusion of drama and acrobatics. The impossible becomes possible in stunning displays of skill and power set against innovative music and otherworldly sets, interwoven with vivid choreography that speaks to all in the universal language of movement. The pendulum of time sweeps backward, paying tribute to the ancient and rare circus tradition of Georgian Dance and then catapults to the future with revolutionary twists on acts such as Russian Swings and Slippery Surface.

Varekai features an international cast of 50 performers and musicians from 19 different countries.



Acts



Aerial Straps

Two flyers suspended by wrist straps glide gracefully above the stage, performing original acrobatic figures in a synchronized display of precision and power. With a double strap, the two artists meld midair, becoming one in a series of striking acrobatic silhouettes.



Clown Acts

No circus show would be complete without clowns! The two characters amuse the audience with acts that are simply absurd.



Flight of Icarus

With agility, deftness and sensitivity, a young man performs astounding dives and contortions in the net that holds him captive.



Georgian Dance

This act takes its inspiration from a long tradition of resistance in the Republic of Georgia, where inhabitants took to battle with numerous invaders over the centuries. The movements of the dancers recall the Georgians' struggles against powers that sought to dominate their land. Endurance, precision and more than a hint of frenzy mark this act.



Handbalancing

Showing astonishing grace, strength and flexibility, a young woman balances on a series of strategically placed canes. Poised now on her feet, now on her hands, she contorts herself on her canes, maintaining a delicate equilibrium.



Lightbulb

Always on the lookout for new inventive ways to mess or interfere in the life of the inhabitants of the forest, the Skywatcher helps the Guide in a dire situation!



Russian Swings

Propelled by two Russian swings, acrobats are hurled high into the air, landing on their partners' crossed wrists or on a landing canvas. In feats of outstanding audacity, the acrobats even soar from one moving swing to the other!



Single-Point Trapeze

Suspended high above the stage or flying through the air on her trapeze, a young woman performs a series of movements displaying her flexibility and strength.



Slippery Surface

Darting and intertwining on a specially designed sliding surface, the artists fling and catch each other, creating an illusion of skating.



Synchronized Tumbling

A group of 5 acrobats uniquely blend the disciplines of men's gymnastics and rhythmic gymnastics into an impressive synchronized tumbling display. Using an inflatable surface, these creatures of the forest launch themselves into the air combining saltos with powerful choreography and high-level acrobatics.



Solo on Crutches

Like a jointed puppet, a performer on crutches teeters in a stirring dance.



Sticks (Rotation Act)

Displaying incredible agility and manipulation skills, this young but fierce woman puts a twist on Baton twirling. She demonstrates extreme coordination as her sticks become an extension of her body movement.

Characters



Icare (Icarus)

Innocent and vulnerable, he finds himself wounded in an unknown world. His desire to live and overcome his fears will drive him to new heights and an eventual rebirth.



La Promise (The Betrothed)

An exotic creature who enraptures Icarus with her sensual beauty. She will be his guiding light and he, in turn, will be the catalyst for her metamorphosis.



Le Guide (The Guide)

Weathered by the sun of many centuries, he's like a kindly, fragile great-grandfather—a wise old man whose mission is to inspire and bring about change.



La Vigie (The Skywatcher)

Mad scientist and ingenious inventor, collector of the world's memories and interpreter of signs, this is a man who receives signals, transforms sounds and forewarns of trials and tribulations.

Costumes

Eiko Ishioka has had a hand in several artistic disciplines, including designing costumes for the cinema, theatre and opera. However, the circus arts were uncharted territory for her. For *Varekai*, she set herself the double challenge of designing resolutely original costumes and giving new shapes to the traditional Lycra bodysuit.

Safety, comfort and freedom of movement are essential factors in the design of acrobatic costumes. Never losing sight of these objectives, Eiko Ishioka dreamt up exuberant costumes that make the already spectacular acrobatic feats look even more audacious. The vibrant, flamboyant colours and unusual shapes of Eiko Ishioka's costumes accentuate the artists' movements, enhancing their beauty and grace.

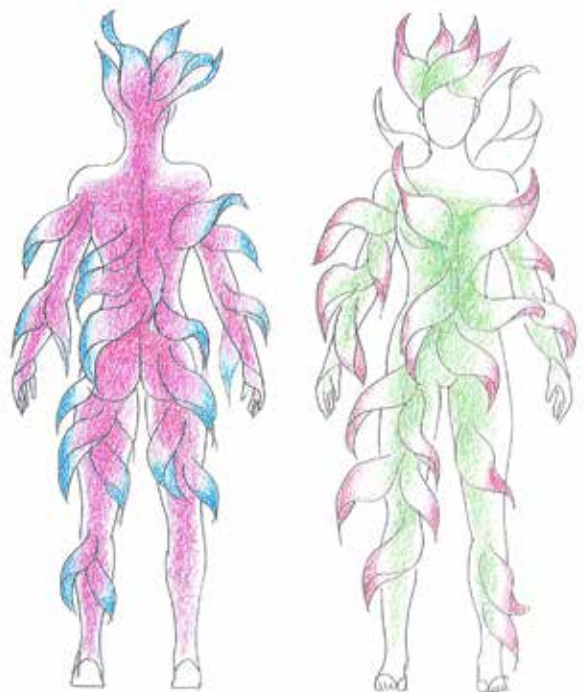
Varekai Costume Fun Facts:

- The design of *Varekai*'s costumes involved finding technical solutions to ensure comfort and safety. The highly skilled costume makers fashioned the most original creations—after no less than 33,000 hours of hard work!
- Moleskin (Lycra) continues to be one of the most popular fabrics, on account of its flexible, elastic and easy care properties. Some special materials were also used, such as flexible titanium rods and sponge nylon.
- The show has over 600 costumes, shoes, wigs, hats and accessories.
- It takes a total of 250 hours a week to keep the costumes impeccable on tour.
- The artist's make-up is so complex that it can take between 45 minutes to an hour and a half to apply and each artist does their own!
- The *Varekai* wardrobe team consists of 4 permanent touring staff and 2 local wardrobe employees in each city who launder, repair, iron, repaint the shoes and retouch the hats.



Cirque du Soleil Costume Fun Facts:

- All costumes are custom-made and the majority are produced at the Costume workshop in the International Headquarters in Montreal, Canada.
- The only facility of its kind in North America, it has over 300 full-time employees, including specialists in fields as varied as shoemaking, textile design, lace-making, wig-making, patternmaking, costumes making and millinery.
- Each year, the Costume workshop artisans use more than 50 kilometres of fabric. 80% of all fabrics are treated and dyed in-house by the artisans of the textile design team.
- Shoes are hand- and custom-made for all artists by the artisans of the shoe workshop. The leather pieces are dyed, trimmed and assembled on location. Brand new sports or dance shoes are sometimes altered to meet the specific requirements of a costume. On average, nearly 3,000 pairs of shoes are produced by the workshop every year.
- Hats can be seen in every *Cirque du Soleil* show and are a key part of the costumes. Like the costumes, they are custom-designed and made in the workshop. To do this, the milliners mould and build the hats on models of the artists' heads. When artists arrive at *Cirque du Soleil*, they must have a mould made of their head.



Music

To create the musical score for *Varekai*, Violaine Corradi drew inspiration from the vast repertoire of world music. Each piece seems to evoke a meeting or juxtaposition of different cultures, which are not always identifiable.

Violaine Corradi combined the sounds of Hawaiian rituals, the songs of 11th-century troubadours from the south of France, traditional Armenian melodies and gospel music with contemporary arrangements to conjure up the unique musical universe of *Varekai*.

The 7-piece band includes a bandleader/keyboard player, a second keyboard player, drummer, percussionist, bassist, violinist and a wind instruments player and two singers—one male (The Patriarch) and one female (The Muse).

In almost all of *Cirque du Soleil* shows, the music is performed live. Unlike musicals, the music needs to adapt to what is going on on-stage and not the other way around. To do so, the band leader, the musicians, the singers and the sound staff are in constant communication via headsets and microphones during the show.



Set Design

Stéphane Roy set out to create a contextualized set for *Varekai*—a design in which all the elements harmonize with the poetry and language of performance: costumes, scenery, and music.

The *Varekai* universe is made up of . . .

The Forest

A fabulous and mysterious hideaway where the *Varekai* characters have made their home. Consisting of over 300 “trees” between 4.5 metres and 10.5 metres tall, the forest is also interspersed with twenty-odd “acrobatic trees” that its inhabitants can climb up to see what’s going on.

The Stage

Extending out of the golden forest, this is the terrain on which the characters move about. It’s a golden clearing with a diameter of 12.8 metres. Specially designed for the show’s aesthetic and acrobatic needs, the stage harbours five traps, two turntables and an elevating platform.

The Catwalk

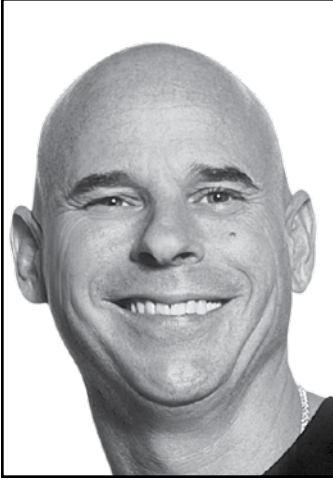
Reminiscent of the spine of an immense bird, the catwalk is the invention of the forest’s inhabitants. It allows them to step outside, collect bits and pieces and climb high in their quest to touch the sky. Used by artists to travel over the stage from one end to the other, this 30-metre long staircase is key to their survival.

The Lookout

At the end of the catwalk, just above the audience, is the lookout—the centrepiece of the set. It is a link to the outside world, a lookout point to see what lies ahead. This 7 square-metre platform also serves as a cabin for one of the forest’s inhabitants.



Creators



GUY LALIBERTÉ
GUIDE AND FOUNDER



DOMINIC CHAMPAGNE
WRITER AND DIRECTOR



ANDREW WATSON
DIRECTOR OF CREATION



STÉPHANE ROY
SET DESIGNER



EIKO ISHIOKA
COSTUME DESIGNER



VIOLAINE CORRADI
COMPOSER



MICHAEL MONTANARO
CHOREOGRAPHER



BILL SHANNON
CHOREOGRAPHER



NOL VAN GENUCHTEN
LIGHTING DESIGNER



FRANÇOIS BERGERON
SOUND DESIGNER



FRANCIS LAPORTE
PROJECTIONS DESIGNER



CAHAL MCCRYSTAL
CLOWN ACT CREATOR



NATHALIE GAGNÉ
MAKEUP DESIGNER



JAQUE PAQUIN
RIGGING DESIGNER



ANDRÉ SIMARD
AERIAL ACTS DESIGNER

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL AT A GLANCE

From a group of 20 street performers at its beginnings in 1984, *Cirque du Soleil* is a major Québec-based organization providing high-quality artistic entertainment. The company has close to 4,000 employees, including 1,300 artists from more than 50 different countries.

Cirque du Soleil has brought wonder and delight to close to 160 million spectators in more than 400 cities in over sixty countries on six continents. For more information about Cirque du Soleil, visit www.cirquedusoleil.com.

THE MISSION

The mission of *Cirque du Soleil* is to invoke the imagination, provoke the senses and evoke the emotions of people around the world.

THE CREATION OF CIRQUE DU SOLEIL

It all started in Baie-Saint-Paul, a small town near Québec City in Canada. There, in the early eighties, a band of colourful characters roamed the streets, striding on stilts, juggling, dancing, breathing fire, and playing music. They were *Les Échassiers de Baie-Saint-Paul* (the Baie-Saint-Paul Stiltwalkers), a street theatre group founded by Gilles Ste-Croix. Already, the townsfolk were impressed and intrigued by the young performers – including Guy Laliberté who founded *Cirque du Soleil*.

The troupe went on to found *Le Club des talons hauts* (the High Heels Club), and then, in 1982, organized *La Fête foraine de Baie-Saint-Paul*, a cultural event in which street performers from all over met to exchange ideas and enliven the streets of the town for a few days. *La Fête foraine* was repeated in 1983 and 1984. *Le Club des talons hauts* attracted notice, and Guy Laliberté, Gilles Ste-Croix and their cronies began to cherish a crazy dream: to create a Québec circus and take the troupe travelling around the world.

In 1984, Québec City was celebrating the 450th anniversary of Canada's discovery by Jacques Cartier, and they needed a show that would carry the festivities out across the province. Guy Laliberté presented a proposal for a show called *Cirque du Soleil* (Circus of the Sun), and succeeded in convincing the organizers. And *Cirque du Soleil* hasn't stopped since!

A Few statistics

- In 1984, 73 people worked for Cirque du Soleil. Today, the company hires close to 4,000 employees worldwide, including 1,300 artists.
- At the Montreal International Headquarters alone, there are close to 1,500 employees.
- More than 100 types of occupations can be found at Cirque.
- The company's employees and artists represent more than 50 nationalities and speak 25 different languages.
- More than 160 million spectators have seen a Cirque du Soleil show since 1984.
- Close to 15 million have seen a Cirque du Soleil show in 2015.
- Cirque du Soleil hasn't received any grants from the public or private sectors since 1992.

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL®

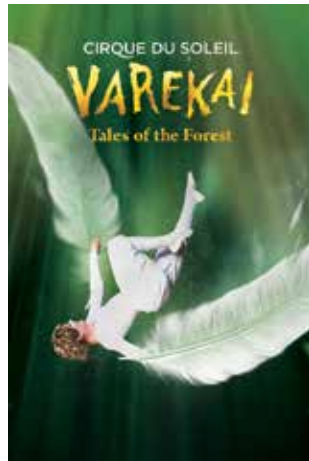


In 2016, *Cirque du Soleil* will present 20 different shows around the world.

TOURING SHOWS IN ARENAS



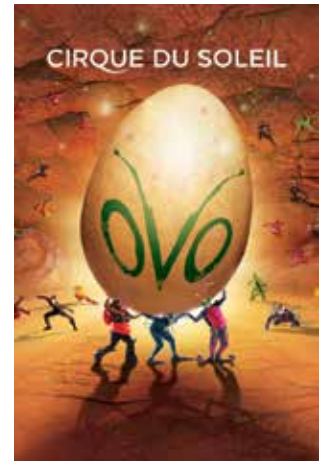
Australia / New Zealand



Europe



North America

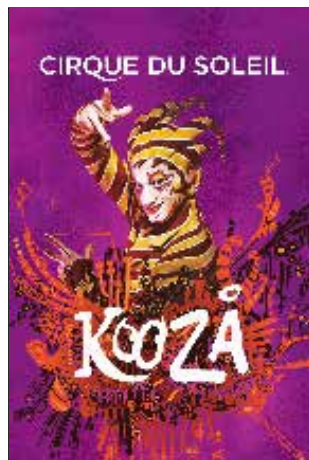


USA

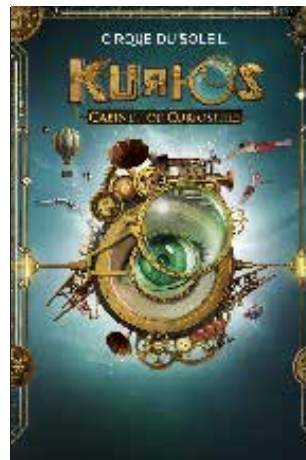
TOURING SHOWS UNDER THE BIG TOP



Europe



South America



North America



Japan

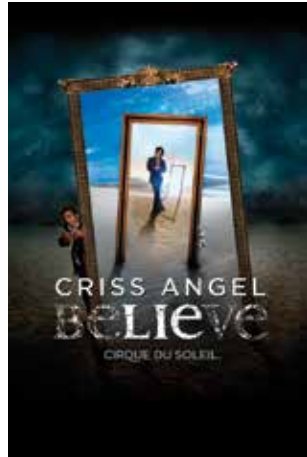


North America

RESIDENT SHOWS



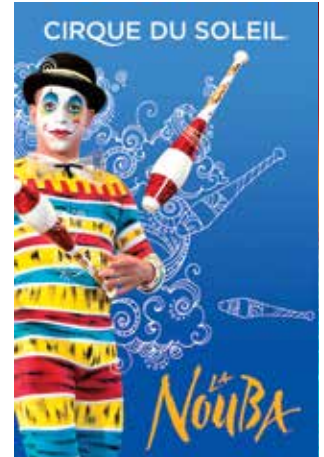
Mexico



Luxor
in Las Vegas



MGM Grand
in Las Vegas



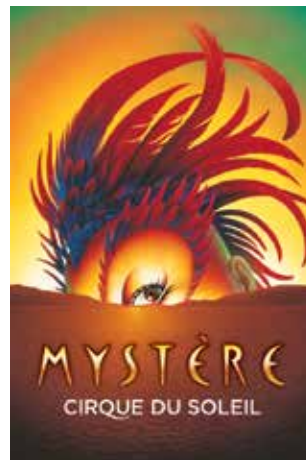
Walt Disney World® Resort
in Orlando, Florida



The Mirage
in Las Vegas



Mandalay Bay
in Las Vegas



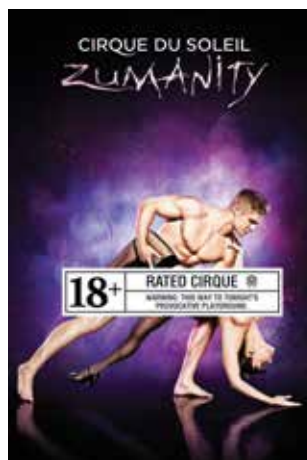
Treasure Island
in Las Vegas



Bellagio
in Las Vegas



ARIA Resort & Casino
in Las Vegas



New York-New York
Hotel & Casino
in Las Vegas



Lyric Theater in New York

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